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THE INHERITANCE WHICH A GOOD MAN LEAVES TO HIS CHILDREN.

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DISCOURSE

OCCASIONED BY THE

DEATH OF JAMES FREEMAN CURTIS;

AND PREACHED AT

KING'S CHAPEL ON SUNDAY, APRIL 21, 1839.

By F. W. P. GREENWOOD.

PRINTED BY THE REQUEST OF THE FAMILY OF THE DECEASED.

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NOTE.

MR. JAMES FREEMAN CURTIS, Superintendent of the Boston and Worcester Rail-road, was suddenly deprived of life, on the morning of April 13th, 1839, at the age of forty-two years. He died, it may be safely said, in possession of the confidence of the community, and the love of all who knew him. The following discourse was delivered as a tribute to his memory, and a call on the thoughts of the surviving, but not with the remotest view to publication. As, however, it was requested for the use of members of his family, it has been willingly surrendered to their disposal, in the hope that it may afford some comfort to those who mourn, and some assistance hereafter in enabling his children to trace the features of their father's character.

DISCOURSE.

PROVERBS XIII. 22.

A GOOD MAN LEAVETH AN INHERITANCE TO HIS CHILDREN'S CHILDREN.

THE assertion of the text is true in two senses ; in its literal and temporal sense, and in its higher and more refined sense ; and it is more completely and without exception true, in the latter sense than in the former.

It is true in general, that a good man will leave a temporal inheritance to his children and his children's children. It may be a large, it may be a small inheritance ; but in all probability it will be sufficient to the children's need, and, having been obtained rightfully, and not by wrong and robbery, it will in all probability be enduring. For it often seems to those who watch the course of things in this world, as if a mark were set by Providence on the gains of ungodliness, which stamps them for certain waste and dispersion.

But still it must be allowed, that there are many exceptions to the rule, that a good man will leave

a temporal inheritance to his family. It is not a rule which we should be willing to abide by, in all cases, as a test of goodness. Many good men die poor, though never forsaken; and their seed have no temporal inheritance from them, though they may not be brought to beg their bread, — an event which neither God nor man will suffer. By some one or more of those vicissitudes of life, which come indiscriminately to the good and the bad, that portion of the world's wealth which the good man has laid by in store for himself and his children, may be invaded and taken away; or he may not be gifted with those qualities which enable one to acquire and retain what is called property; or he may be summoned by death, before he has had time, with all requisite qualification, to gather up a property. However good, therefore, a man may be, there is no certainty that he will leave behind him a temporal inheritance. This must be allowed, and by us it will be allowed most willingly and even cheerfully; for in it there appears to us no less than an intimation from above, that the goods of this world are not of the first value, and no less than a divine caution, that we should not regard and pursue them as such. They are uncertain, unstable, and not to be relied on, because they must be kept in their proper place as altogether secondary objects of regard and pursuit. They are not the constant effect of virtue, because virtue must be vindicated in her throne, as sufficient to herself, and it must be shown that of herself she is

capable of conferring happiness. Goodness is of itself an end, an end the most worthy. It must not be degraded, or stand in danger of being degraded, into the subordinate rank of a means; which degradation would be its destruction. There is a better inheritance than house and lands; and these things are often permitted to elude even virtuous efforts, and to be snatched from virtuous hands, that their inferiority may be the more plainly seen, and they may enter into no competition with that better inheritance.

There is, I repeat it, a better than a temporal inheritance which the good man leaves to his children. As in several other respects, so it is especially better in this, that it is not, like temporal wealth, uncertain, fleeting, subject to vicissitude, but sure, permanent, beyond the reach of change. It is of inestimable value, and its value is crowned by this circumstance, that it is indestructible. The conflagration which lays a whole city in ashes, leaves this inheritance untouched and safe. The storm which whelms a richly laden fleet beneath the waves, and frightens nations with its roaring, has no more power over this inheritance than the gentlest breeze. Neither the ignorance nor the unfaithfulness of men can do it any injury; and it is not affected in the least by misfortunes in business, or the fluctuations of the times. It is an inheritance which the good man will certainly leave, and which his children and his children's children will certainly enjoy.

I would speak of this better and unfailing inheritance. I would point out some of the invaluable treasures of which it is composed.

In the first place, it is the inheritance of an honest name. The good man is careful to preserve this treasure while he lives, knowing that its preservation lies with himself alone, and depends upon his own single care ; and when he dies, a seal is affixed to it by death, which insures it against all fear, and renders it imperishable. He may rest in peace, for it then belongs inalienably to his children. Well is he rewarded for his faithfulness. Happy was it that he paid unto every man his due ; that he would not incline his ear to the voice of any temptation ; that he did not permit himself to be dazzled, when many others were to their confusion, by the specious glare of sudden riches, but restrained his desires within sober and moderate limits, acting always on the principle that no gain in prospect should induce him to hazard another's trust, and that no gain in possession, of whatever magnitude, could be reckoned a compensation for the loss of one grain of integrity. Happy was it that he labored cheerfully on, in the ways of uprightness, and in the hearty love of it, not pausing for a moment to question the expediency of his course, or to doubt the excellency of his soul's preference. Now his wisdom and his success stand out clear and prominent in the face of consenting earth and approving heaven. Now it is evident that he had been constantly employed in laying up a treasure

which could not be dissolved; that whether the times were prosperous or unpropitious, he was ever adding to his store, — when times were most unpropitious indeed, then adding most copiously; and that whether others were losing or gaining, he was still gaining. So long as he had lived, he had held fast to his integrity, never letting it go, or bartering it away. And here is the bright result of all this constancy and accumulation, — an honest name, — a name without spot or tarnish, — a name commanding more true homage from human hearts than gold or gems can purchase; — a treasure in which all his friends feel the most lively interest, but which is peculiarly the inheritance of his children.

Of many things which we esteem, there will be some things which we esteem the most. What child is there, who does not esteem the honest name of his parent, a legacy more to be prized than any earthly one which he has left, or could have left him? What sons or daughters are they, who do not feel, if they have any high and generous feeling, that while their father was acquiring by diligence and faithfulness, in the sight of God and men, a fair reputation, an honest name, he was working not only for himself, but most judiciously and effectually for them? I appeal to the highest sense of our nature, the sense of right. I appeal to the filial heart. I do not fear to be disappointed by the answer. And I will appeal also, in this connexion, to the parental heart. I will beseech pa-

rents to consider, that by leaving to their children an honest name, they will leave to them that best inheritance, the place of which cannot be supplied by any other bequest; and that if they do not leave them this, they may leave them nothing, leave them entirely destitute, because all earthly wealth is uncertain. I will pray them also to consider, that their children, with the common faculties which God gives to men, can obtain earthly wealth or competency for themselves; but an honest ancestral name they cannot obtain, — no, not if they work till their fingers are worn to the bone, till their heart is sick, till their brain is on fire. If parents will labor to leave a temporal inheritance to their children, together with an honest name, let them so labor; it is natural; there is no commandment against it; — but in mercy let them leave an honest name! — and let them pray earnestly that the temporal inheritance may not prove, as such inheritance often has proved, a bane instead of a benefit.

2. But there is another treasure which a good man leaves to his children as a portion of their inheritance. Honesty is much, but it is not all. Simple as is the description of character expressed by the words “a good man,” it yet implies, especially when used in Scripture, and should always imply when used seriously by Christians, a great deal of meaning. A good man is not only honest, but generous and charitable, and he leaves to his children the blessings of his generous and charita-

ble deeds. He has not merely paid his own debts ; he has assisted others to discharge theirs. He has not merely resisted temptations to speculation and extravagance, but he has resisted temptations to covetousness and closeness and hoarding. He has enlarged himself unto surrounding humanity. He has been ever ready for offices of love and kindness. When the poor have cried for bread, he has not stopped to consider whether this or that neighbor had not more bread to spare than himself, but he has answered the cry at once, and given from his own loaf as he could. Infants shivering in the streets he has taken to his own fireside and warmed, and has clothed them with his own children's garments. His sympathies have been moved also for those who were suffering from mental and moral as well as physical starvation and nakedness. His pity and his aid have visited the ignorant, the misguided, the depraved, and he has done what he could, and more than the world has known of, to shed the light of instruction, and order, and virtue, into the dwellings of darkness. And therefore blessings have been invoked upon him from those who were ready to perish. Blessings have been invoked upon him from cold and narrow rooms, and by unknown tongues, but warm from the heart, and heard kindly above ; and they have been repeated still more earnestly at his funeral, when all that was in grateful bosoms concerning him has gushed out as a flood ; and they remain as the inheritance of his children. And let his children prize them. Let

them learn how rich is the legacy which is made up of thankful memorials and poor men's benedictions.

3. There is yet more in the inheritance which a good man leaves to his children. He has been a true father to them ; a true husband to their mother. If the flame of his love, and the light of his character, have burnt more purely in one place than in another ; if anywhere they have radiated peculiar warmth, and diffused peculiar joy, — it has been in his own home. Every bosom there has been penetrated by the glow, and every face has reflected the brightness. By no attention to his business abroad, by no fatigue after daily toil, has he felt himself dispensed from his duties to his own house, and his own flesh and blood. How patiently he has borne the burthens of those whom he loved ! How firmly has he guided waywardness, and corrected delinquency ; but how kindly has he attended to the little demands and wants springing up perpetually before him ; how heartily has he entered into the joys of childhood, and how gently has he soothed those young sorrows which intrude among the joys, as if to give presage of what is to come hereafter ! His instructions have been so judiciously administered, that knowledge and happiness have been associated together, and have grown up together, in the minds of his pupils. His cheerfulness has been so genial and so uninterrupted, that no gloom or shadow could stay long in the constant sunshine of his presence. If vexations have en-

countered him without, he shuts his door against them when he comes in, and will not suffer them to trouble his sanctuary. Not setting himself up as an example, he yet lives an example of domestic virtue and usefulness. And when his step is no more listened for, approaching his house, and his loved and guiding voice is no more heard within it; when God has called him to a higher and more enduring home; his house is not left desolate, for the spirit of his example remains to preside over it, and to bless it as before. It is a part of the inheritance of his children. Its memory to those who are old enough to store up the exercises of his affections, and its tradition to those who are too young to remember, are a portion of their family goods,—and what would tempt them to alienate or exchange such an inheritance? What amount of wealth could be named as an equivalent?

4. One treasure yet I must mention, as a component part of the inheritance which a good man leaves to his children. All that I have hitherto recounted, would be imperfect without it. Vast is the worth of the moral virtues and the domestic affections, and unwise are they who would disparage or degrade them. But I slight them not, but only render them their highest honor, when I say that piety is their crown. A good man is a pious man. A father of a family is kindest and truest, when he impresses the faith and conviction upon them, that he and they have a Father in heaven. His piety need not be of the kind which speaks

much aloud and abroad ; but it will surely be of the genuine kind which dwells and burns in his heart, and directs his ways, and manifests itself in due attendance on public worship and observance of Christian ordinances, in serious speech on serious subjects, in thankfulness for blessings, in confidence in a higher wisdom, in submission in trials and sorrows, in reverence and obedience of the Saviour, and in looking upward, and teaching his children to look upward from this changing earth to immortality. And when he has gone to his reward, when he has entered into the possession of that inheritance which his own heavenly Father has laid up for him, “incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away,” — the gracious influence of this his piety abides with his children, and still teaches them to look upward, and keep themselves in the love and beneath the protecting wings of the Almighty Guardian. This is the crowning gift of their inheritance, — the influence of their father’s piety, — a household treasure, valuable beyond computation. Ah, what is there like piety, to knit a family together in the bond of peace ! What is there like piety, to make home a temple, the house of man the house of God ; to breathe into the hearts of the indwellers a spirit of praise and joy in the time of prosperity, and of trust and reliance “when troubles rise, and storms appear !” We are feeble creatures, but this is our strength and might. We are exposed to manifold and sudden dangers, but this is always our refuge. We are

dying creatures, but this is our perpetual life. Piety must indeed be the children's own, in order that it may avail them as a possession and defence; but what is so likely to fix it in their hearts, and nourish and foster it, and make it their own, as the memory and influence of their father's piety, abiding in the house, a dear and hallowed inheritance.

An honest name; the blessings of charity; domestic example; the influence of piety;—these form the inheritance which a good man leaves to his children. It is a spiritual, ample, imperishable endowment, in comparison with which, all other riches are poor. The world cannot bestow it, nor add to it, nor diminish it, nor take it away. Let the children value it as they should, and appropriate and improve it, that they may hand it down to their children after them.

My friends, you know the occasion which has led me to the choice of this topic. The angel of death has appeared among us with a swift message, and summoned away from our society one of its most esteemed members, and from the bosom of his family a most endeared husband and father. You have expected that I should make some reference to so afflicting an event; that I should not suffer it to pass unnoticed. Easily might I have excited you, by dwelling on the manner and circumstances of this bereavement; on the suddenness of the shock; on the consternation and anguish which it caused to many, and above all, to *one*. Easily might I have

done this, for that scene of suffering has not been absent from my own mind a single day, I might almost say a single hour, since it occurred. But I have preferred a calmer course, not less profitable to survivors. I have preferred to speak of the exceeding value of that inheritance, which, let the circumstances of death be what they may, a good man leaves to his heirs;—of that inheritance which has been left by our departed friend to his widow and to his children.

THE following notice appeared in the Boston Daily Advertiser a few days after the decease of Mr. Curtis. It is republished here because it contains a few details of his early life, which will be interesting to his children.

THE sudden termination of the active and useful life of JAMES FREEMAN CURTIS calls for something more than a brief notice.

The writer of these lines has known the subject of them long and intimately, and he *thinks* he can give an impartial sketch of his life and character.

Mr. Curtis was the son of a merchant of this city, a member of the house of Loring & Curtis, one of the oldest firms in this country, the survivor of whom, by his uprightness during a long life, has been crowned with success and honor.

The deceased was named for the late Reverend Dr. James Freeman, the bold yet candid and liberal parent of Unitarianism in this country, to whom he was nearly related. Mr. Curtis was educated at the Latin School in this city. At the beginning of the last war with England, in June, 1812, being between fourteen and fifteen years of age, he obtained his father's consent to enter the naval service of the United States, and made his first voyage as a Midshipman on board the frigate Chesapeake, which cruised many months under the command of Captain Samuel Evans. In June, 1813, the frigate sailed again from Boston, under a new commander, the brave but unfortunate Lawrence, and was captured the same day by the Shannon. Mr. Curtis, in that bloody battle, in which the Captain, first Lieutenant, Master, Boatswain, Marine Officer, and an acting Lieutenant, comprising almost all the deck officers, were killed or wounded, serv-

ed as *aid de camp* to the commander. He was carried to Halifax, and was one of the officers selected in retaliation by the British, as hostages, for the lives of certain Englishmen imprisoned by our government. Mr. Curtis afterwards served as Midshipman in the *Constitution* when, under Commodore Stewart, she captured, in the same action, the frigate *Cyane* and the *Levant*. He was sent home by the Commodore, second in command of the *Cyane*, and arrived with the prize at New York. In 1815, after peace with England, Mr. Curtis joined the fleet sent under the gallant Decatur, to chastise the Algerines, then in power in the Mediterranean. His next service of importance was as first Lieutenant of the brig *Porpoise*, which was ordered to the West Indies to protect our commerce from the numerous pirates. Mr. Curtis personally destroyed, by leading his men in boats up a deep lagoon, at the imminent risk of his life, one of the most considerable establishments of these miscreants. After these duties had been performed, he obtained a furlough, and made several voyages to India and Europe in the merchant service, and when captain of a brig, it fell to his lot to rescue the lives of eight fellow beings, left in the midst of the Atlantic, their ship having foundered. While in command of a large vessel belonging to an eminent mercantile house in New York, with a crew principally of foreigners, Mr. Curtis, by prompt and vigorous action, quelled a dangerous mutiny, and drove the whole crew down into the forecabin, where he kept them confined, and, with his mates, his steward, and a lad, (one of his younger brothers,) navigated his vessel to her port of destination.

In 1824, at which time he was married, he resigned his commission in the navy.

In 1830, he was appointed agent of the Cocheco Manufacturing Company, at Dover, New Hampshire. On the

adoption of a new system of regulations in conducting the business of the Corporation, the operatives were so much dissatisfied and excited by the change introduced, that a large body of them marched about the town with drum and fife and banners, expressive of their hostility to him. By his firm, but gentle demeanor, he soothed their asperity, induced all whom he desired to have, to return to their duty, dismissed the ringleaders and malcontents, and from thenceforth possessed the confidence and respect of the entire population.

In 1835, he took charge of the Boston and Worcester railroad, with extensive powers and authority from the Directors. The judgment and fidelity with which he exercised those powers justified their bestowal. His whole time, all his talents, and finally his life were devoted to his duties there. His leading characteristics were strict *truth* and *justice*, tempered by mildness in the exercise of them.* He required from all under him the observance of their duties, but he did it in such a manner, and he exhibited to them such an example as endeared him to them, instead of offending them.† His manners were simple and unassuming, and he was as guileless as a child. He was a sincere believer of Christianity, and endeavored to practise the precepts of its Author, especially in "doing always unto others as he would that others should do unto him." He never believed ill or spake ill of any one, and would never per-

* This was manifested in small as well as great things. A little anecdote has been told us since his death, which illustrates his exactness. The friend of a poor invalid applied to Mr. Curtis for a gratuitous passage in the cars to Worcester. He refused to grant the request, but gave him the money to pay his fare with.

† One of the conductors of the Railroad trains informed us, that, in all cases of difficulty or danger, Mr. Curtis's order was not "go," but "*come*."

mit it in his presence without rebuke. Envy and fear were alike unknown to him ; and his temper was by nature so gentle, and was withal so governed, that in the highest excitement and provocation he preserved his coolness and moderation.

The duties of his station occupied a large share of his time, especially the first year or two when organizing the admirable system of transportation on the Boston and Worcester Railroad, by which so many passengers are safely carried, who little know the anxious hours devoted to ensure their security ; — yet he found time every day or evening to instruct his children, seven of whom, under thirteen years of age, are made fatherless by this event. — His remains were deposited in Mount Auburn. As we stood under the branches of an ancient oak, which seemed to spread its arms protectingly over his grave, observing the last, sad ceremony, those exquisite lines of Bryant, in his *Thanatopsis*, passed through our mind.

“ As the long train
Of ages glide away, — the sons of men, —
The youth in life’s green Spring, *and he who goes*
In the full strength of years, — matron and maid, —
And the sweet babe, — and the greyheaded man, —
Shall one by one be gathered to thy side,
By those, who in their turn shall follow them.
So live, that when thy summons comes to join
The innumerable caravan, that moves
To that mysterious realm, where each shall take
His chamber in the silent Halls of Death,
Thou go not like the quarry-slave at night,
Scourged to his dungeon, but sustained and soothed
By an unfaltering trust, approach thy grave,
Like *one who wraps the drapery of his couch*
About him, and lies down to pleasant dreams.”

No one who looked on the placid countenance of our deceased friend, could doubt his happiness.

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